

a toast

here's to nick and nora charles,
pioneer hedonists who brightened the way
out of our grim cotton mather past.

they won where many stout revelers succumbed:
f. scott, zelda, hemingway, and crews gallantly
pursued the gin-filled grail until
john calvin, not john barleycorn, completely broke them.

but the pox of collective guilt and depraved man
could not daunt the thin man and his wife.
she, in genuine liberation, poured as they drank
for breakfast, lunch, and supper
without a single belch of shame.
nor did they ever start the day
stabbed with remorse or headache pledges.
nick usually set the morning tone:
"how about a drop to cut the phlegm?"

they loved life, each other, all the pleasures
of the flesh, despite Salem's fire and brimstone,
and Asta stands as wagging proof that
they were just alive, and not rebelling.
nora always slept with nick, not the dog,
and all three remained completely non-neurotic.

To Ellen

Dear Claudia. this is a love note written to you
with my golf pencil because i cherish you most
for your fairway grace, for always allowing me
to play through, for never ruling out of bounds
my Laker games, though you don't dig a Hairston pick;
endless repeats of Shane, High Noon, and One-Eyed Jacks;
bridge, where i follow my own convention;
flash floods of beer and pool at the 49-er.

no other woman -- only a lady -- ever gave her man
a lifetime membership to his own private club
where there is just membership for one.